The BRIGHT DOOM

John Hall Wheelock

BY JOHN HALL WHEELOCK

THE BRIGHT DOOM.

THE BLACK PANTHER.

DUST AND LIGHT.

LOVE AND LIBERATION.

THE BELOVED ADVENTURE.

THE HUMAN FANTASY.

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

THE BRIGHT DOOM

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A BOOK OF POEMS

BY

JOHN HALL WHEELOCK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
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TO MY MOTHER

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THE BRIGHT DOOM

Spirit of Life,
How great a lover of yourself you made
In fashioning this spirit! I have walked
The earth in ecstasy and adoration.
Live in me now—stretch out my heart, while here
On one of your innumerable worlds
I stand, and lift my face into the night.

I

EARTH

NOON: AMAGANSETT BEACH

GLORY—glory to God in the highest—and on earth,
Glory! The everlasting sun
Has laid his hand upon the harp-string, with the music of his mirth
Heaven and ocean are one chord, in unison.

He has spoken—he has spoken—from his midmost throne
In the blue hollow of noon he has spoken! Heaven has heard
The sound of the song of his shining; he has made known
To listening Space his wonder, and revealed his word—

Who sheds his light upon the earth, and upon the dark place,
Light! And upon the waters of the sea,
Light! O Father, pour down thy light upon me—touch my face!
Hallow me, my Father—even me.

Here, where the long ranges of the dunes roll
Their tawny billows to the south and to the north, and against the sky

Flutters the pale sea-grass, fresh is the wind—and the whole
Clear hollow of heaven is full of the wine of thy glory,
even as I.

The waves curve upward—they fail—they fall—
Dragging, dragging, along the dim sea-reach,
The heavy hem of the garment of the waters; rhythmical,
rhythmical
Is the rustle of the sea's robe upon the beach.

Along the shallows, along the far shore-line
They burst in thunder and light—where the gray shingles gleam,
The tongue of the foam is a tongue of fire: the hollows of the
breakers shine,
Darken—and are shattered as a dream.

But out where the further waters have their sleep,
On the pale meadows of ocean, on the barren fields and
bare,
That the sea-bird wanders, that the sea-wind wanders—on
the illimitable Deep,
Silence. The silence of the immensity is like a prayer.

Interminable—interminable—interminable—the void sea—
The many ways, the many waves. In the huge round

NOON: AMAGANSETT BEACH

Of the sorrowful heavens, in the hushed vacancy,
No voice. . . . Vastness without bound.

This is my heart's country. These lonely lands
Are one with my wild, lonely heart; these winds and waves that roam
Old, desolate ways forever—they are one with me—these sterile sands
And bitter waters. Here is my heart's home.

Amid these large horizons and spaces that she loves,
My spirit's thought, on lorn adventurings
And inconsolable quests intent, endlessly moves—
And spreads upon the eternal solitude her fleeting wings:

Even as a sea-bird on the changeless, changing,
Pale pastures lost, as a sea-bird on the wild waste astray,
Searching the everlasting reaches—failing—faltering—like a sea-bird ranging—
Wandering, wandering the wide way.

. . . . . .

Loneliness—loneliness forever. Dune beyond dune,
Stretches the infinite loneliness—pale sand and pale sea-grass,

NOON: AMAGANSETT BEACH

Pale beaches, mile upon mile. In the immensity of noon
A hawk moves upon the wind. Clouds darken, and pass. . . .

The sound of the breathing of the sea is hushed, on the far shore
Her robe lies fallen; the white waves, one by one,
Subside into slumber, and cease into slumber: from the blue vault to the blue floor
Heaven is a shining room filled full of the sun.

He hallows the waters. The benediction of his light is shed
Upon the proud waters. Emerald—turquoise—chrysoprase—
Glitter the waters! The garment of his glory is spread
Upon the everlasting waters, upon the everlasting ways.

THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

HEAVEN is full of stars to-night, the earth
Lies hushed, as she shall lie some day perhaps,
When life and death no longer trouble her—
No voice, no cry in the whole countryside.
The empty road rambles through field and thicket,
And in the road are prints of hoof and foot.
Along the surface of this lonely planet,
Now naked to the hunger of the stars,
Man and beast—on the old pilgrimage—
They passed together here, not long ago.

What was it they were looking for I wonder,
Or if, themselves, they knew? Where were they going?
Footsteps—always footsteps going somewhere—
What country is it that they all are seeking,
Who up and down the world, by night or day,
Move with such patience, always to one end?

Not the least sound. Not the least leaf disturbs
The immemorial majesty of heaven.
Footprints—only footprints going somewhere . . .

Wherever they were going, they are gone.

THE HOLY EARTH

IN the immense cathedral of the holy earth,
Whose arches are the heavens and the great vault above,
Groined with its myriad stars—what miracles of birth,
What sacraments of death, what rituals of love!

Her nave is the wide world and the whole length of it,
One flame on all her altars kindles her many fires;
Wherever the clear tapers of trembling life are lit
Resound for joy the old, indomitable choirs.

The holy church of earth with clamorous worshippers
Is crowded and fierce hungers, faithful every one
To the one faith; that stern and simple faith of hers
Contents the heart that asks no pity, giving none.

Each on the other feeds, and all on each are fed,
And each for all is offered—a living offering, where
In agony and triumph the ancient feast is spread,
Life's sacramental supper, that all her sons may share.

They mingle with one another, blend—mingle—merge, and
flow

Body into wild body; in rapture endlessly
Weaving, with intricate motions of being, to and fro,
The pattern of all Being, one mighty harmony:

One Body of all bodies woven and interwrought—
One Self in many selves, through their communion
In love and death, made perfect; wherein each self is nought
Save as it serve the many, mysteriously made One.

And all are glad for life's sake, and all have found it good
From the beginning; all, through many and warring ways,
In savage vigor of life and wanton hardihood
Live out, like a brave song, the passion of their days.

With music woven of lust and music woven of pain,
Chapel and aisle and choir, the great cathedral rings—
One voice in all her voices chaunting the old disdain
Of pity, the clean hunger of all primal things.

From the trembling of Arcturus even to the tiny nest
Of the grey mouse the glories of her vast frame extend:
The span of her great arches, stretching from east to west,
Is endless—the immense reaches are without end.

. . . . . .

Evening closes. The light from heaven's high window falls
Vaguer and softer now. In vain the twilight pleads
With stubborn night, his shadow looms on the massive walls—
Darkness. The immemorial ritual proceeds.

The spider in her quivering web watches and waits;
The moth flutters entangled, in agony of fear
He beats amid the toils that bind him; she hesitates
Along the trembling wires—she pauses—she draws near.

She weaves her delicate bondage around him; in the net,
As in a shroud, he labors—but, labor as he will,
The cunning threads hold fast; her drowsy mouth is set
Against the body that shivers softly, and is still.

And through the leafy dark the owl with noiseless flight
Moves, peering craftily among the tangled trees
And thickets of the wood all slumbrous in the night—
The fledgling's bitter cry comes sharp upon the breeze.

With dreadful ceremony all things together move
To the one end: shrill voices in triumph all around
Prolong deliriously their monotone of love—
Arches and aisles are heavy with incense and dim sound.

THE HOLY EARTH

Hush—the whole world is kneeling! Murmurous is the
air—
The Host is lifted up. Upon the altar lies
The sacramental Body. The wind breathes like a prayer—
Solemnly is renewed the eternal sacrifice.

With mingled moan and might of warring wills made one
The vast cathedral shudders. From chancel, nave and
choir
Sounds the fierce hymn to life: her holy will be done!
Upon her myriad altars flames the one sacred fire.

LONELINESS WITHOUT END

UNSEARCHABLE is the Imagination
That stretches out the heavens, and around
The shores of earth widens, in exultation,
The infinite waters without bourn or bound.

Between the immensities of heaven and ocean
My spirit's thought makes forward falteringly,
Lone as a sea-bird that with veering motion
Moves on the windy meadows of the sea.

Far though she fare, far though her flight aspire—
However far—it shall but be to find
New wastes beyond, new ways for the desire
Of the unfathomable and spacious Mind.

In the vast reaches of His meditation—
The sorrowful distances—her stricken wings
Flag, failing her; my heart's imagination
Faints, in the lonely endlessness of things.

THIS QUIET DUST

HERE in my curving hands I cup
This quiet dust—I lift them up.

Here is the mother of all thought,
Of this the shining heavens are wrought,
The laughing lips, the feet that rove,
The face, the body that you love:
Mere dust, no more—yet nothing less;
And this has suffered consciousness,
Passion and terror; this again
Shall suffer passion, death, and pain.

For, as all flesh must die, so all,
Now dust, shall live. 'Tis natural;
Yet hardly do I understand—
Here in the hollow of my hand
A bit of God Himself I keep,
Between two vigils fallen asleep.

LONE BEAUTY

IMMORTAL Beauty in this mortal heart,
Lone Beauty dwelling in these hearts that die,
How shall it be with me when you are gone,
Leaving me broken in the darkness here!

Where shall I seek you in that hour when Time
Roars in my ears, and the Reality,
At whose dear breast my mouth of being clung,
Recedes, refusing me? Then shall I hear
The sound of some irrevocable thing
Slowly withdrawn—shouts and reverberations,
Echoes and murmurs of the sea of life
Ebbing forever from the fading brain—
And my last thought run on, crying, to you.

But you—O darling and indifferent—
Amid the multitudinous minds of men
Shall live forever, lonely as before.

SEA-VOYAGE

TO what dark purpose was the Will employed
That fashioned, ere the dawn of Time grew dim,
The waste of ocean—from clear rim to rim
A crystal chamber, sorrowful and void?

For, surely, not without design He wrought
These vast horizons on whose margins rest
The extremes of heaven, nor from east to west
Widened the waters to the bounds of thought.

Half-hopeful, half-incredulous, I wait
For some gigantic Presence to assume
His throne in the large circle of the room.
The dreadful distances are desolate.

In vain! In vain! He is departed hence
Whose breath troubles the waters of the sea:
Twilight and night are sworn to secrecy,
The heavens preserve their ancient innocence.

SEA-VOYAGE

In the enormous throne-room of the sun
No voice is audible. The waves are mute.
Solitude, infinite and absolute,
Bears witness to the unreturning One.

Evening, on the lorn reaches of the sea,
Comes vast and patient; but the night is kind—
Her hand is pity, scarfing up the blind
Sorrows and wastes of the immensity.

The wind is soft among the swaying spars.
Heaven deepens; dusk reveals the glittering height
And cloudless glory of the arch of night,
Bowed down from rim to rim with solemn stars.

When dawn across the broad and billowing plain
Casts her pale fire, the monstrous solitude
Of huddling waters—the old hope renewed—
Thrills with blind love and yearns, but all in vain.

Sheer to the east, sheer to the west extend,
Far as the wandering wings of thought may grope,
The eternal vacancies. No hope, no hope—
Distance, distance forever, without end.

SEA-VOYAGE

Hour by hour and day on burning day,
Our vessel plows the soft, reluctant foam;
Hour by hour and mile on mile, we roam
The lonely and the everlasting way.

Still fades before us the enormous round—
Blue sea below, blue heaven overhead—
The Void, eternal and untenanted,
A chamber for His splendor, without bound.

STONE AND IRON

NIGHT—and the shadow of great walls.
The city sleeps, her muffled pulses start—
And ebb, flagging in the long intervals.
I lie alone, with wakeful heart.

In stone and iron bound,
Brood the old sorrows; avenue and street
Are hushed—no sob, no sound of feet.
My heart listens. Not a sound.

My heart listens. A cry
Pierces the dark—a lonely voice somewhere
Trembles, and is still. I hear a cry
Out of the dark, somewhere.

Night slumbers on. . . .
The cañons are
Empty—no echo save
For a lone car
Far-off, that rumbles and is gone.
Then silence—the silence of the grave.

THE LOWLAND COUNTRY

O THAT I might be again
In the leafy solitudes
Where the ancient beauty broods
And the heart is healed of pain!

In a certain hidden place
Shined-on by the evening-star,
Where the woods and waters are
Dear as a belovèd face.

'Tis a country to my mind:
All the hills and heights are green,
With clear meadows in between—
All the woods and ways are kind.

There the spider all day long
Spins her web with cunning skill,
And the cricket on the hill
Makes one music of his song.

THE LOWLAND COUNTRY

Night and day a dreamy noise
Hovers 'round it—night and day,
And the world is far away,
And the silence has a voice.

In the lowlands, in the deep
Solitude for miles around,
To a hushed and happy sound
Time itself has fallen asleep.

O that I were there again,
By the meadows drenched with dew!
Where the ancient dream comes true,
And the heart is healed of pain.

AUTUMN ALONG THE BEACHES

A YEAR, with all its days, has come and gone
Since last under the arch of heaven I stood
In the old ecstasy, and looked upon
These endless waters, this bleak solitude.

All is unchanged: the sea-birds wheel and pass,
The patient dunes go down along the sky
In wavering lines of green, from the scant grass
A single cricket lifts his solemn cry.

Autumn is on the wind; the chilly air
Is wide and vacant, the pale waters seem
Paler and lonelier—lonely and bare,
The tawny beaches, fading like a dream.

On the right hand of heaven there is light—
And on the left is darkness and the gray
Cover of cloud; southward the sea is bright—
But northward sorrow and shadow all the way.

AUTUMN ALONG THE BEACHES

Dull blues and purples, glossy black and green,
On the one hand—and on the other, sheer
Glory of gold! The waters in between
Are doubtful—half in hope, and half in fear.

But always a cold light along the rim
Wells secretly, the under-heavens cast
Cold light along the verge under the dim
Borders of darkness where the clouds are massed.

Around one center the slow bulk revolves;
Far out, a haze curtains the mystery
Of some ecstatic deed—the cloud dissolves
And sheds his drifting rain upon the sea.

It is the bridal of heaven and ocean—brief
Is the rapt moment ere the gauzy veil,
Crumbling, is lifted. As with tremulous grief
Of parting, the divided wastes are pale.

Wan wastes of wave, and glimmering wastes that crowd
The worn horizon—passion and regret.
Sea-scud, and faltering light, and trailing cloud
Reluctant, where the old longing labors yet.

AUTUMN ALONG THE BEACHES

The slant rain slackens. From the hopeful, blue
Meadows of heaven, widening evermore,
A sudden shaft of light comes piercing through,
And points a shining finger down the shore.

Alternate gleam and shadow! Like a wand
The running radiance all along the line
Travels with soundless motion. Far beyond,
Headlands and dunes and brightening beaches shine.

Darkness is rolled away: the great banks move
Northward, save for a few high streaks that show
The vault of heaven still higher far above—
So high they seem, yet lie so far below.

They move like swans upon an azure lake—
The bleak skies of the autumn afternoon
Wash 'round them in chill loveliness and make
Their fleecy edges brighter, fading soon.

The room of the world is bare from bound to bound,
A vacant chamber—heaven overhead
Is a blue ceiling, the heavens that wall it 'round
Are blue, before me the blue floors are spread.

AUTUMN ALONG THE BEACHES

Blue mile on mile, from deep to azure height
Eastward, the everlasting arches loom!
Blue mile on mile forever to the bright
Limits! The world is like an empty room.

On the void sea no sail, no sign. Far out,
A lone bird, through the shifting corridors
Of billowing water blown and tossed about,
Wavers and veers along the windy floors.

Loneliness—endlessness—and mystery!
No voice disturbs the silence of the sun.
No shadow is on the surface of the sea.
The clouds are scattered and darkness is undone.

The huddled waters in their sorrow move
At the wind's will that herds them without stay
Over the barren reaches, drove on drove—
A myriad waves all moving the one way.

SUNDOWN

EVENING—and shadows lengthening to the east,
Cold light along the rim; and our Father, the sun,
Gone westward in a glory of trailing cloud.

O holy Father of us all—
Praise him, earth, with all your voices!
Praise him, wind and sea!
For though he forsake you, surely he shall return.

Hail, Father, and well done—for now it is ended!
The earth, my mother, praises—
And I praise you,
Who am, by her, your true-born child.

THE HEART GROWS OLD

I

I HAVE come back at last to the old home,
After long days of absence. It was here
That in my burning youth I loved and sang,
And all that I have loved and lost is here;
And still the meadows and the woods are dear
And beautiful—though now to me they are
Less beautiful, less dear.

Earth and her dreams remain forever young,
It is not beauty that grows old, but I:
The moon floods the pale cloud, and from the grass
The cricket sounds the endless song—but I
Am silent. Listen!—it is the owlet's cry.
O heart of mine, what distance have we come
Since last we heard that cry!

II

Earth and the ancient joy are ever young—
When has she changed, for all her many days?
The cloudy banners of her hope are hung,
Spring after spring, through all the woodland ways.

The meditations of the secret earth
Are steadfast and enduring: these remain—
Her sacramental rites of death and birth,
And the old mysteries of love and pain.

Time and the years like wandering clouds go by:
The moon still floods the wood, and from the hill
The cricket lifts the immemorial cry—
And the immortal joy is flowing still.

The everlasting song is still unsung,
And the eternal tale is never told:
Earth and the ancient joy are ever young,
It is the heart that withers and grows old.

RETURN TO EARTH

I HAVE no fear at last to be
Home with her that cradled me,
Nor shall my being shrink to blend
With her dark being in the end—
So one we are, so well I know
The bounty of the heart below,
Her holy love. Have I not heard
The lonely and prophetic word
Her hushed hills and valleys keep
Locked in their eternal sleep!
In Bethlehem, in buried days,
So the sacred story says,
Out of her ancient dream awoke
The elemental heart, and spoke
Such thunder in the ears of men
As echoes ever after—then
Closed her lips in sleep again.

II

TUMULT

SOLITUDES

MY heart is a dark forest where no voice is heard,
Nor sound of foot, by day or night—nor echo, borne
Down the long aisles and shadowy arches, of a horn,
Trembling—nor cry of beast, nor call of any bird.

But always through the deep solitudes a grieving wind
Moves like the voice of a vast prayer; it is your love
Lifting and bending leaf and bough—while, far above,
One thought soars like a hawk, in the heaven of my mind.

THOSE TWO

IT was love's holy day, so great and sorrowful-hearted
That day was—all the little, all the common things
Shone with the light eternal; it was the day we parted—
The last of our evenings.

You whispered the old words, you broke the sacred bread,
You poured anew the living wine—and quietly
You lifted up your eyes, pleading, and your eyes said
Always, "Remember me."

And lo! at the last supper, as once around the board
The disciples with the Master sat, I sat with you:
Judas was seated there, and Love, the very Lord—
Those two.

ONCE IN A LONELY HOUR

UPON my breast
Once, in a lonely hour, your head was laid,
And you had rest
From much that troubled you—you were no longer afraid.

But now, even here
No refuge is; you shall not ever lie,
As once, in my heart's shelter here,
Poor heart, while the great hounds of Time go roaring by.

Vain was the strength
You leaned on in that hour, you did not guess
How vain the strength
Whereon you propped your ignorant lovingness.

And yet—what more
Has life to offer life, here in the lone
Tumult? A little rest, no more—
Upon a heart as troubled as its own.

COMPASSION

I HAD cried out to you
From the darkness and the solitude of my pain;
And yet you would not hear—
And so I cried again.
Then—suddenly you were near.

Was it myself
That answered when I cried so timidly?
Yes—for the One
Being has many forms. It was
Myself, in another breast, that answered me.

TRUCE

HARSH is the struggle, and too soon we learn
In life's blind tumult to give blow for blow,
Thrust for keen thrust; armed and alert we go,
Little is the security we earn
Before the dark tide of the battle turn,
Setting against us—and it has been so
From the beginning and, for all we know,
It shall be, to that end none may discern.

So to our hardened hearts all strange they come,
Those hours of truce amid the iron days,
When, unaccustomed, for a brief period—
Baffled and faint, incredulous and dumb—
On one kind human heart, in love's amaze,
We lie at rest, as on the heart of God.

THE DARK MEMORY

IT was our love's Gethsemane, and you wept.
Around us, in the drab twilight, the little room
That had known our love, that had known our tears and our laughter, kept
Shamed silence. Silently 'round us rose the gloom—

And in the street the first few lamps were gleaming; day's
Last fire on garish windows glared. The light
Feebled—over the huddled city's wastes and ways
Gravely and pitifully came the night.

Darkness—and from far-off a siren mourned. The sands
Of time drew downward, but still no word was said,
No word—only your poor hands lying in my hands
So hopeless, against my shoulder your poor head.

You were so tired, you were so hushed, so fain,
Poor love, all blind with weeping; pinched and small
Your face shone in the glimmer—but I, who felt no pain
Save pity, I was so eager to end it all.

And I could not endure it; suddenly my heart grew old—
In the gray evening, in the drab twilight—while, one by one,
Your hot tears ached along my hands. O stern and cold
I sat beside you, in that last hour, and you wept alone.

. . . . . .

Such was the stage appointed—with darkness 'round about—
For our youth's drama; pitiful and bare
The scene—no crowds applauded, no sorrowing strings cried out,
But the eternal tragedy was there.

. . . . . .

Brief was our parting, very brief, and without a word.
With a mute kiss we parted—you turned, and I,
Closing the door, in the outer hall-way heard,
Already as if from far away, your sudden cry.

That cry—what silences followed! What silences haunt the space
Of the years grown wide between us! On barren rhyme
I have wreaked my youth; I have followed a phantom loveliness—your face
Fades in the hungry darknesses of Time.

But now, in my nights, now, in my loneliness, I know
The bitter passion that moved those tears, and why,
When my life went home to you—when the tides groped—you shuddered so,
And the agony of that love, the dolor of that cry.

Had you foreseen, O wise and sad, the unkinder ways
My feet must wander on strange roads? Did you foresee,
Beyond that wilful hour, the desolate nights and days—
And the tears that I pitied so, were they shed for me?

O fatuous dream, that like a sword clove us apart!
Dear room, where once your sorrowing lips on mine
Trembled—where humbly for my proud and ignorant heart
You broke the bread and poured the living wine!

Love, I have heard it told, is God, and once Love found me—
Across my heart his very heart was bowed—
He came to me out of the darkness, his arms were laid around me:
But I was stubborn, I was foolish, and very proud.

THE DARK MEMORY

Often, often now, in the silence of the after-years,
In the night I remember your weeping. O my own,
In the darkness I have remembered them, your sacred tears
Shed for my sake, and how you wept alone.

HUSHED MIDNIGHT

I HEARD the owlet call,
A little, quavering call—
Timidly, timidly out of the dark it cried:
'Twas midnight,
By candle-light
I sat alone, and the light was burning low;
And I thought of you that once had loved me so,
And of my lonely youth, my stubborn pride.
Heart of my heart, it was you out there in the night—
It was you that cried.

"I SOUGHT YOU"

I SOUGHT you but I could not find you, all night long
I called you, but you would not answer—all the night
I wandered over hill and valley; heaven was bright
With crowded stars, and I was calling you in many a song.

The road through wood and meadow rambled here and there:
Few were the travellers on that lonely road, and none
Had heard of you, by wood or meadowland—not one
Had heard of you, or seen you passing anywhere.

At midnight, thirsting for your loveliness, I lay
Under the shadow of the leafy hill, and cried
Three times, calling upon your name. No voice replied . . .
The pebbly brooks went babbling, babbling, all the way.

The waters had a drowsy sound, the hills were steep—
My heart grew tired travelling; but there was no place
That suited me, and I was homesick for your face.
Dreaming of you, at the wood's edge I fell asleep.

UNREST

THERE are three tremblings sweet to think upon:
The trembling of a poplar-leaf in the wind,
The trembling of a woman in the moment of love,
And the trembling of the stars . . .

STORM-WIND

YOU came—and like a stormy wind your love
Blew over the lone waters, and the sea
Of my heart's life was shaken violently,
And all the trembling waves began to move,

And cried their love out to the shore, and cast
Their love upon the shore—but you were gone!
Yet still that restless flood is roaring on,
Where once so great a wind of beauty passed.

And still, from the calm heaven of my mind,
My thought, like a great hawk on lonely wing,
Watches those waters laboring, laboring,
In troubled multitude, broken and blind.

REVERBERATION

AT night, in the old house of life I lie alone:
Spiders have fastened their soft webs, like clouds, between
Rafter and ceiling; threshold and gray floor are grown
Heavy with dust, where for so long no foot has been.

Mice, in the dark of the old walls, gnaw at the deep
Roots of the night, and softly on the dewy air
The cricket's cry comes drifting in—even in sleep
I hear it, but I am too sorrowful to care.

Love has left me and Song has left me, and I know
I am a harp, silent to all those lovely Things
That laid such hands upon me here so long ago.
Night deepens. Darkness covers me with her wings.

So many a night, with all its stars, has come and gone,
Watching my rest; so many an evening all in vain
Has lit for me her trembling lamps. Sleep is upon
These eyelids that are sealed in slumber and disdain.

REVERBERATION

Only the murmur, vaguely felt, of the hushed blood
That on the shores of the old dream, like a vast sea,
Moves, in the darkness, mourning; and in the solitude
Of my heart's forest a far horn sounds drowsily. . . .

III

SONGS AND MEDITATIONS

THE MULTITUDINOUS ONE

BEHOLD in us the Multitudinous One,
The myriad motions of Whose Being are
Life and the pain of life! One Self we are,
Though clothed in many forms. These laboring minds,
These bodies, bruised and broken, are but strands
In the eternal Body that through birth,
Death, and the throes of travail without end,
Renews Itself; and all our tumult is
But the one Will among the many here
When with fierce pity and remorseless love
And with unutterable joy It strains,
Seeking a passage through the bleeding web
And tangled meshes of blind wills at war—
God's Being, in act, which is Man's agony,
And glory, too: for on that agony
His rapture rests; our passion is His peace,
And He is woven of us, as we of Him.

MEDITATION

EVENING has quieted the wind, the night
Is soft around me while I sit alone
And reading by calm candle-light.

The voice of a forgotten poet cries,
From the clear page, up to my listening heart;
And my heart listens, and replies.

And yet, even in loveliness I find
No refuge from old wonder; the old thoughts
And the old questions come to mind.

Was it for this the ravin and the rage,
The lust and hunger of the centuries
Clamored—to close in this calm page?

What blood was shed for this? What roving herds
In meadowy pastures, what brave things have died
To feed the music of these words?

MEDITATION

Beauty is desolate, being the crown
And end of all; to her the laboring years
Lift yearning hands, and Time bows down.

The ages travail with a great unrest,
In agony and ecstasy, to build
The frail arch of one dolorous breast.

I will not think of this; I will read on
In these calm pages. It is written here:
The Song to the Belovèd One.

The heart that wrought it, and the cunning hand,
Are stilled forever, and the poet lies,
Forgotten, in a far-off land.

The iron bondage of old Time and Space
Withholds me from him, whom I have not seen;
Nor shall I look upon his face.

He takes his ease in the dark earth, and there
Has rest from all his labors, and the night
Covers him with her heavy hair.

MEDITATION

If I could pierce into that hushed abode
Of slumber and corruption, I should find
The mouth from which this sorrow flowed.

It would be quiet now, for all it cried—
Quiet and imperturbable: it is
With its own sleep preoccupied.

Yet, surely, in this very room it sings
Miraculously to my heart to-night.
How shall I understand these things?

I will not think of them; I will read on
In these calm pages. It is written here:
The Song to the Belovèd One.

The night is hushed around me while I move
Darkly, with dreamy thought, from page to page,
From line to line, of grief and love.

Now, in the silence of the night, I read
These words, the opening of the final prayer:
Song, for thy sake with Death I plead.

MEDITATION

The lonely splendor of Antares shines
Through the barred window, and an aphis crawls
Among the letters and the lines.

He moves among them with uncertain will
Fitfully, and between the words, "*I plead,*"
Falters a moment—then is still.

Little he guesses what these letters are,
Nor I the meaning of the trembling Word
Written beyond us, star on star.

The night covers us both, and we are driven,
Like leaves before the wind, through the immense
And glittering wilderness of heaven.

Earth takes us with her: silently she swings
Through the old orbit, bearing in her breast
The drowsy mouth—the mouth that sings.

And yet, all this lives only in my mind;
And when that darkens, the whole world will darken
Suddenly—the whole world go blind.

MEDITATION

All I have touched, all I have loved and known
Will fail me—and the breast of Life draw back,
Leaving me in the dark, alone.

O starry universe, hung in the clear
Bell of my mind, be living in me now!
Dwell in me for a moment here!

How often in the many minds of men
Have you been born, only to pass away—
Dying with every mind again!

This is a thought that is too hard for me:
It is a bitter thing to think upon,
That, to myself, all this shall be

As if it had not been, when I am gone.

THE MASQUE OF BEING

THE fish-hawk over the water and the gray fish that goes
Glimmering through the water—the preyer and the prey—
They follow or hasten ever; they wrestle together, they close
In the old fearful fashion, in the old fierce way.

Harsh are the rites of being, and bitter is the war
Waged between life and life by the blind will-to-be:
Yet all if they but knew it, are one—lovers they are
Who strive, each with the other, in a great mystery.

COMMUNION

SACRED is the communion of man with man
Through speech: dearer than wine, dearer than bread
Is the low talk around the open fire
Or under the clear stars, whereby his heart
Is mingled with the heart of his own kind.
After the fret and turmoil of the day
The tired seamstress leans into the twilight,
And, in the alley, with her neighbor shares
Grave nothings; while in billiard-room or bar,
'Mid thunder of laughter, the old joke goes 'round,
Or ribald story. Wherever two are met,
There speech is and the ancient fellowship,
Making us one, who are but wanderers
Upon a lonely way.

And therefore men,
That death itself may not divide them forever,
Have whispered to each other across the years,
In rune or rhyme, ballad, fable or myth,
Their passions and their sorrows; and a glory
Gathers about his memory who most

Has shared with us, out of his love, himself.
Blessèd beyond all others are the heads
Upon whose front falls the immortal gleam—
In distant lands perhaps, beyond far seas,
From sun-washed islands or gray promontories,
Lifted across the years to give us light—
Spirits at which our groping youth was fed,
The drowsy lips from which all dreams come down,
Makers of music, whisperers of secrets,
Though in the darkness of the centuries
Hidden away—the hands folded, the heart
Quiet—still musical, still murmuring,
In many a legend, many a rustling page,
Sad songs and dreams that drift about the world,
The old incorrigible ecstasy—
Despite all death, despite all doubt, all doom,
Still passionate, still intimate with us,
And full of a fierce love.

And sweet it is
To sit—echoing spirit and singing spirit—
As friend with friend, by the wayside of the years,
Above the dust of time and circumstance,
And hear, in the lone hour of delight,
The sacred things that man has said to man

For comfort of his sad and wondering heart:
News from a traveller on the common way—
How lies the land, whether the hills be steep
Or valleys fruitful, where the waters run,
Or March hides the first flower—ponderings,
Praise of the road, doubt for the journey's end
Or of the purpose of the pilgrimage,
(If there *be* purpose in the pilgrimage)
Questions, questions and reassurances,
Words that the generations past have worn
Upon their lips for love's sake, that shall lie,
Trembling, upon the lips we may not reach:
The immortal Legend, the old tameless Song,
Wherein, to us—who all too easily,
Too often and too easily, forget—
The splendor, the unimaginable splendor,
Holy and stern, of all reality,
In happy moments is revealed anew;
Hints of a meaning, echoes of the high
Sorrowful music to which all things move,
With all their warring voices, to one end,
Violently. Amen—so *shall* they move,
Till Time's lone harp fall silent, till the years
Slumber, and all be as a tale long told.

THE VICTORY

I SHALL take flight from Death on sudden wings,
In some swift song; he shall not have me here—
For all his cunning, all his snares and slings,
I shall escape him, whom I fear.

Then, though he wander through all woods and ways,
He will not reach to *me*, out of the strong
Net of these tangled nights and days
Escaped forever in a song.

But now my wings are broken and I hide
In this tall grass, to hear his foot go by
Stealthily, stealthily—
Searching the field on either side.

Heal me, O Time, and I will rise again
On swifter wings and for a surer flight,
Remembering this pain!
So, when he comes, he shall not find me here,
By day or night—
But search forever, and in vain.

THE YEARS

MY dreams wear thinner as the years go by:
The stony face of Fate into my own
Stares, with that granite look of hers; and I
Stare back, with a still face—but not of stone

GOLGOTHA

TAKE me down from this cross, for now my body is broken,
And the feet pierced and the hands pierced, and in my side
The heart fails me—it breaks, and the words that I have spoken
Are as nothing; you were deceived in me, and I have lied.

Take me down, lower me from the tree—yet slowly,
My spirit is heavy and my heart sick, my flesh is sore
From the bruising and from the bitter scourging, and the holy
Dream that was in me once is in me now no more.

There is no virtue left in me, there is not any
Hope left in me to help you: if it must be done,
As it was written in the old days, that one for many
Should be uplifted—truly, I am not that one.

The nails bite deep into my flesh—shall I endure it
Longer? No longer! Loose me, take me down and lay

My body in the cool tomb, and seal it up, secure it
Against the faces, the proud faces, the blind day.

For I am tired and have need of night to cover me,
And secrecy wherein to hide my shame, and deep
Silence and solitude forevermore, and over me,
Darkness—and a lone resting-place and a long sleep.

And yet, nevertheless, perhaps a little longer
I may endure it. Father, if this thing must be,
Give me the strength. Ah yet, perhaps, a little longer . . .
I will pour out Thy love upon them in my agony!

AFFIRMATION

Poem delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society, Harvard Chapter, Cambridge, June 24, 1927

I

WHAT word of courage may I bring to you,
What word of comfort—brothers and my friends—
Now the returning season gathers us
Into these folds and pastures of our youth,
Come for an hour of high communion here!
Frail and imperfect is the instrument,
And yet perhaps through me that Self may speak
Which is most wise, being woven of us all—
And through the generations still endures,
Shedding its generations like dead leaves,
One Self—the spirit of Man; for we are one.

For we are one, who are emprisoned here
Upon this turning planet as it swings
Through the lone waste and labyrinth of heaven—
One in our plight, one in our common doom,

AFFIRMATION

One in our stubborn questioning, and one,
Beyond all other creatures, in the sole
Sad consciousness of our predicament—
Pilgrims and outcasts between birth and death,
Scanning the frontiers of the night for news;
Probing the atom; challenging the cell;
Knocking at every gate and every door
Of the inexorable silences;
Wondering; doubting; grieving; worshipping—
Perplexed before the mystery of things.

Now while the earth turns eastward, half in light
And half in darkness; from the Himalayan snows
And Mongol uplands to the Texan desert
Or where the starry waters dawnward heave
Out of the west from Asia—on blue hills,
'Mid iron cities or green solitudes,
By land or sea, in darkness or in light—
The restless Spirit moves in many ways,
The multitudinous Being is abroad.
We gather in theatres; we brood alone;
We pour with laughter through the shining streets;
We till the earth; we lift our towers to heaven;
We watch beside the sick-bed; on grey capes,
On crags and headlands of the world we set

AFFIRMATION

Our winking fires from coast to coast; or wander
The wastes of ocean with a furrowing prow;
We sleep; we turn the pages of a book,
And move in silence out of space and time;
We grapple each other; we hate; we fear; we kill;
We cry aloud; we yearn, kneeling in prayer,
Lifting our faces to the emptiness;
In busy factories and teeming dens
Weaving the fabric of the world's desire;
Lying in prisons; sitting upon thrones;
Judging the earth in wisdom and in truth.
Now while the earth turns eastward—even now,
The divine tragedy of Man proceeds:
The poet walks the room; the ballerina
Advances to the footlights—on one body
Is fixed the hunger of a thousand eyes;
The priest moves to the altar; and the harlot
Slinks through the alleys of the darkened town;
The bride puts on her bridal-wreath; the judge
Condemns the felon; and the dying man
Coughs—and is silent, as the new-born babe
Nestles in the exhausted mother's arm.
Over the death-bed now some head bows down;
Somewhere the cry of the new soul is heard;
While through the leafy lanes the lovers move

With loitering step or pause among the shadows,
Kindling between their lips the flame of life.
Perpetual death, perpetual rebirth,
Perpetual passion and perpetual pain!
From shore to shore the violent Being rolls,
With all its motions, all its warring wills—
Vast as the sea, forever in unrest;
The waves foam upward, and the waves subside,
And the one ocean gives and gathers all.

Now while the earth turns eastward, half in light
And half in darkness, in her breast she bears
Those other and much greater multitudes
That are as one with us as our own blood—
The nameless or the unforgotten dead,
Whose faces we have never looked upon
Or voices ever heard—our forefathers,
Buried long since: farmers and merchants, kings,
Discoverers and captains, voyagers
On ocean solitudes, sages and seers,
Poets and lovers of the truth of old,
Whereof all history is but the tale,
All legend but the rumor; and who still
Are vehement, and from old books and songs,
From saga or from chronicle, cry out,

AFFIRMATION

Across the ever-widening gulf of time
And the unfathomable night, such words
Of courage and assurance as they may,
To us who follow after—breathing back
A fading music from the fields of death.
They, too, knew the good earth and the glad sun,
The trembling kiss, the infinite farewell;
The lips of longing and the breasts of life
Were sweet to them, who grieved even as we,
Loved and were loved as we are, laughed and sighed,
And had their hour of happiness; they, too,
Asked the old questions—and, like us, in vain;
Were troubled or were sorrowful. But now
To them the moonlight and the starlight are
Less than a voice in a forgotten dream,
At morning, or a flower cast away—
So deep the oblivion that wraps them 'round,
So dark the night that hides them. They sleep well,
They take their fill of sleep; they have their rest
As once, in the beginning, ere the womb
Had travailed that conceived them.

And us, too,

The lonely and inevitable Voice
Shall summon, and the silence take us home.

AFFIRMATION

All shall be gathered homeward—he that sang
And he that listened, the lover and the loved,
The lips that pleaded and the hands that blessed
Lie mingled in the darkness, and these hearts
That beauty haunted be a little dust,
Blown 'round the narrow margins of the world;
We shall be one with the revolving planet
Throughout the ages, till the earth itself,
With all its millions, all its sleeping sons,
Pass like a cinder down the Void or mix
With the primeval fires casting up
The foam of future worlds along the dark.
Perpetual death, perpetual rebirth,
Perpetual passion and perpetual pain!
Is there no respite from the wheel of things?
Is there no refuge from eternity?
The heavens grow old and hunger for their peace;
The father founts, Antares and Arcturus,
Vega, and Sirius, and the nursling flames—
Ceaselessly dying, ceaselessly reborn—
Tire of the one tune and find no way
Out of the woven web of space and time
In which the worlds are tangled; but all move
Through the fierce throes and cycles of rebirth
Laboriously, with groaning forces held

AFFIRMATION

In iron bondage, to the eternal Rhythm,
Whose meaning and whose end we may not guess.

What word of courage may I bring to you,
What word of comfort! For the restless mind,
Gnawing the riddle of eternity,
Finds little solace there or sustenance.
Our faiths have fallen from us and left us bare;
The dream, fantastic and compassionate,
That like a veil of love and glory hung
Between us and the bitterness of things,
Is lifted, and the universe has grown
Vaster and much more lonely. Nor shall Thought—
Crying into the dark, and listening, listening—
Find any answer to her prayer: the night
Is soundless, and the starry mouths are sealed.

Yet be assured indeed that all is well
And the truth greater than we dare to dream—
Greater and more exalted! Though the mind,
Fashioned for humbler uses, may not grasp
The meaning of the mystery; though Thought—
For all her longing, all her labor—gain
Hardly the comfort of a hope, there is
A self within us, wiser than the mind

And deeper than all thought, that still endures
Firm at the helm through all the storms of chance
Forever, in unquenchable belief
And courage, not to be abated: Life,
In wrath and fear, in love and agony,
Weaving her splendor from the dust of death,
Bears in her breast—though inarticulate—
A holier confidence; her running grass,
Her herds trampling the uplands, her fierce wills
In bush or brake, her ravening hosts that throng
The fields of ocean and the aisles of air—
Furious, furious for continuance—
These answer, these bear witness all is well,
These in indomitable joy affirm
The wonder and glory of a universe
Wherein all lusts, all hungers, all defeats,
All agonies are woven to one Doom,
Somehow sublime, somehow magnificent;
And every heart-beat is an act of faith,
Praising the hidden Purpose!

Stern, my friends,
Are the realities: the wheel of heaven
Revolves, with all its motions, and the planet
Heaves forward blindly, bearing us along

AFFIRMATION

Into the Void—we know not why nor where;
Embattled between two oblivions
We stand, for a brief moment, and lift up
Our faces to the light—but in our blood
The voices of the generations past
Strive, and the generations still unborn
Are urgent in us that we play our part,
As actors in a stately tragedy
To some triumphant close. Courage and faith,
These are most needful. Surely they shall avail!
Surely they have the truth! And as for Him
Whom we have sought beyond the stars in vain,
Perhaps He may be nearer than we know.

II

How little our true majesty is shown
In these proud minds by which we are confessed
Traitors so often, recreants at best—
Unworthy of life's greatness and our own.
Not by the mind we shall be judged alone,
Who are much more than in the mind is guessed.
By faith we live. The heart in every breast
Labors, believing, toward the end unknown.

Through the shrill mind, in terror and defeat,
The ancient flood of holy being roars;
The gallant heart again and yet again—
Jetting fierce streams of faith—with every beat,
In sacramental affirmation, pours
Life's answer through the unbelieving brain.

III

"And yet at last, when all is said and done,
    Where is the triumph, truly: to have been
    Spectators of an immemorial scene,
And then hurried into oblivion?"
So speaks the mind, self-cheated, while the one
    Splendor in every mind, however mean,
    Works out Its purpose, secret and serene—
And through all living things under the sun.

His presence is the starry multitude,
    And in us also, surely, He abides:
Our bodies are salt shores for the sharp flood
    That through creation rises and subsides
    With ebb and flow of everlasting tides,
Or rhythms of the perishable blood.

IV

Poor timid mind, so agile to defend
Your own misgiving, patient to put out
The light of hope within us and without,
Your own best lover and your own worst friend—
While over us the faithful heavens bend,
While through our veins the justling life-streams shout
Triumph and joy, still pondering the old doubt—
Anxious and unpersuaded to the end!

If it be truth indeed that life through you,
Who are the front of her emergent will,
Waking, asks for an answer and, denied,
Resumes the primal sleep—if this be true,
Dark is the truth. But we are greater still
Than our own thoughts and wiser than our pride.

THE WOVEN DOOM

WE are all woven of the one weaving,
Flower and bird and beast and tree—
The gray kingfisher and the trout,
The toad that spreads a tiny hand
On the earth's carpet quietly—
Heaven, shaken with storm and thunder,
Clouds and great waters, winds and snows,
The starry firmament, the grieving
Heart of man; through earth and sea,
The moth, the tiger, and the rose,
Flower and planet—strand on strand—
The wandering threads wind in and out,
With warp and woof, over and under,
Weaving the ancient unity.

We are all woven in one Story;
One Legend like a sorrow runs
Through creeds and crowns and buried wars,
Prophets and saviours crucified,
Great fortresses, and cities, once
Crowded, now crumbled and forsaken,

Captains and kings of old that spread
Their sails upon the sea: one Glory
Speaks through them all—through swords and guns,
Battles and dreams and hearts that bled,
Lovers, or rulers in their pride,
Desolate lands, and the lone stars
That by the wind of Time are shaken,
And thronging worlds and flaming suns.

We are all passing on together,
In darkness, to the end unknown—
Through all the ways and days of earth:
The thief, the ploughman and the seer,
The dog, the emperor on his throne,
The eyes, bowed over eyes unseeing,
The dying face, the broken heart,
To the one end are moving, whether
Evil or good—but not alone.
Each in the other has a part.
Each as he may, in hope or fear,
Love, lust, or labor, death or birth,
Works out the will of the One Being—
For One is all, and all are One.

SALUTATION

YOU, perhaps yet unborn, that some day shall read these
rhymes—
Know, that I was a man even as yourself, and from the
womb
Issued in nakedness—also, that I suffered the doom
Common to all men, and that I pondered these things many
times;

And ceased. So shall you cease: brief are the days and few.
I have made these songs, that we for a moment might
partake
Of the one dream. This is my spirit offered for your
sake.
Eat, drink; this is my spirit given for you.

It is night, and we are alone together: your head
Bends over the open book, your feeding eyes devour
The substance of my dream. O sacred hour
That makes us one—you, fleeting, and I, already fled!

SALUTATION

Here is my love, here is my sorrow, my heart's rage,
Poured out for you. What tenderness brooding above you
Hallows these songs! I have made them all for you. I love you.
What love, what longing, my brother, speaks to you from this page!

Only the white flowers love the light
Flaming poppies love the light—
So in the darkness who shall see
Their scarlet skirts and trumpery?
So in the darkness who shall know
That they are fine as flowers go?
Beyond the gardener notes them
The flame of heart the Talmit stem?
He will be gather for her vase
The subtle pale unsexed grace?

Life is shown by living grace
The beauty of "The Master" face.
Peaceful, serene, in the inner life
Leads to rest, no low-brow strife

The "early dawn" of resurrection
Exhales the fragrance "celestial flower"
Of the "dew of dawn" under stars of